

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### Jonathan Edward Robins

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#### Education

Ph.D. University of Rochester, Global History 2005-2010  
Dissertation: "The Cotton Crisis: Globalization and Empire in the Atlantic World."  
Committee: Stanley Engerman, Stewart Weaver, Joseph Inikori  
Minor fields: Comparative Nationalism; Islam in the Middle East and Africa  
B.A. St. Mary's College of Maryland, History, *magna cum laude* 2000-2004  
Centre for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, Oxford 2003

#### Academic appointments

Michigan Technological University, Associate Professor of History 2018 - present  
Assistant Professor of History 2012 - 2018  
Morgan State University, Lecturer in History 2010 - 2012  
State University of New York at Geneseo, adjunct Lecturer 2009  
University of Rochester, teaching fellow 2006 - 2008

#### Scholarship

##### Books

Robins, Jonathan. *Oil Palm: a Global History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021.

- Chinese translation under contract with China Worker Publishing House, 2023.
- Winner of AHA Bentley Prize and AHS Wallace Prize.
- Reviewed in *London Review of Books*, *Agricultural History*, *Agricultural History Review*, *Environmental History*, *H-Africa*, *H-Environment*, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, *Diacronie: Studi di Storia Contemporanea* (republished in *Resenha Crítica*) and others.

Robins, Jonathan. *Cotton and Race across the Atlantic: Britain, Africa, and America, 1900-1920*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2016.

- Reviewed in *Agricultural History*, *Journal of West African History*, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, *International Journal of Historical African Studies*, *History*, *Journal of British Studies*, *The Economic History Review*.

##### Peer-reviewed articles

Amponsah-Berko, Daniel,\* Rebecca Kwofie,\* Timothy Eisele, **Jonathan Robins**,  
Mining Aluminum from Landfills: Challenges, Technologies, and the Case for  
Pre-Landfill Intervention," accepted, *Detritus* (March 2026).

Robins, Jonathan. "Humans and Other Pollinators in the Oil Palm Plantation Complex."

- Arcadia*, no. 8 (Spring 2021). Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/9229>.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Shallow Roots: the Early Oil Palm Industry in Southeast Asia, 1848-1940." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2020), 538-560.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Oil Boom: Agriculture, Chemistry, and the Rise of a Global Fats Industry, c. 1850-2000," *Journal of World History* 29, no. 3 (2018), 313-342.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Imbibing the Lesson of Defiance: Oil Palms and Alcohol in Colonial Ghana," *Environmental History* 23, no. 2 (2018), 293-317.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Smallholders and Machines in the West African Palm Oil Industry, 1850-1950," *African Economic History* 46, no. 1 (2018), 69-103.
- Robins, Jonathan. "'Food comes First': Making Food Policy in Colonial Ghana, 1900-1950," *Global Food History* 4, no. 2 (2018), 168-188.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Food and drink: Palm oil vs. palm wine in colonial Ghana." *Commodities of Empire Working Paper Series*, working paper no. 25 (2016)
- Robins, Jonathan. "'A common brotherhood for their mutual benefit': Sir Charles Macara and the International Cotton Industry, 1904-1914." *Enterprise and Society* 16, no. 4 (2015), 847-88.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Lancashire and the 'Undeveloped Estates': The British Cotton Growing Association Fund-Raising Campaign, 1902-1914." *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 4 (2015), 869-97.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Slave Cocoa and Red Rubber: E.D. Morel and the Problem of Ethical Consumption." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 3 (July 2012), pp. 591-611.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Colonial Cuisine: Food in British Nigeria, 1900-1914." *Cultural Studies – Critical Methodologies* 10, no. 6 (2010): 457-466. Special issue on *Food and Power*.
- Robins, Jonathan. "The 'Black Man's Crop': Cotton, Imperialism, and Public-Private Development in Britain's African Colonies, 1900-1918." *Commodities of Empire Working Paper Series* no. 11 (2009).

#### Book chapters

- Robins, Jonathan. "Primary Commodities and Industrial Consumers: The Case of Palm Oil." In William Clarence-Smith, Jonathan Curry-Machado, Jean Stubbs, and Jelmer Vos (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Commodity History*, 287-310. Oxford University Press, 2024.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Cotton." In Jeannie Whayne (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Agricultural History*, 394-410. Oxford University Press, 2024.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Coercion and Resistance in the Colonial Market: Cotton in Britain's African Empire," in Jonathan Curry-Machado (ed.), *Global Histories, Imperial Commodities, Local Interactions*, pp. 100-120. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

#### Book reviews

- Robins, Jonathan. Review of John Nott, *Between Feast and Famine, Agricultural History* (forthcoming)
- Robins, Jonathan. Review of Michelle McDonald, *Coffee Nation: How one commodity*

- transformed the early United States. Register of the Kentucky Historical Review* (forthcoming).
- Robins, Jonathan. "Review of Lacy Sparks, *Women and the Rise of Nutrition Science in Interwar Britain and British Africa*." *Journal of British Studies* 63, no. 3 (2024), 734-736.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Review of Michael Sheridan, *Roots of Power: The Political Ecology of Boundary Plants*." *Journal of Pacific History* 60, no. 1 (2024), 115-116.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Review of Douglas R. Hurt, *The Green Revolution in the Global South*." *Journal of World History* 32, no. 4 (2020), 725-727.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Review of *Palma Africana* by Michael Taussig." *Agricultural History* 93, no. 4 (2019), 751-752.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Review of Jim Tomlinson, *Dundee and the Empire: "Juteopolis" 1850–1939*," *Journal of British Studies* 55, no. 4 (2016), 860-61.
- Robins, Jonathan. Review of Follett, Baker, Coclans, and Hahn, '*Plantation Kingdom: The American South and its Global Commodities*'. H-Environment, H-Net Reviews, 2016.
- Robins, Jonathan. Review of Bruce Baker and Barbara Hahn, *The Cotton Kings: Capitalism and Corruption in Turn-of-the-Century New York and New Orleans*. *Agricultural History* 90, no. 2 (2016), 278-79.
- Robins, Jonathan. Review of Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton. Enterprise and Society* 16, no. 4, 991-93.
- Robins, Jonathan. "A tale of two cities?: jute, empire, and the imperial working class in Dundee and Calcutta. Review of Anthony Cox, *Empire, Industry and Class: the imperial nexus of jute, 1840-1940*." H-Empire, H-Net Reviews (December 2013).
- Robins, Jonathan. "Review of David Sunderland, *Financing the Raj: The City of London and Colonial India, 1858-1940*." *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 52, no. 4 (October 2013), pp. 1117-1119.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Two Models for World History. Review of Antoinette Burton, *A Primer for Teaching World History* and Peter Stearns, *World History: the Basics*." *History: Review of New Books*, 41, no. 2 (2013), pp. 41-43.
- Robins, Jonathan." Review: Jim Tomlinson, Carlo Morelli and Valerie Wright. *The Decline of Jute: Managing Industrial Change. Perspectives in Economic and Social History*." *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 51, no. 3 (July 2012), pp. 782-783.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Review, Ronald Hyam's *Understanding the British Empire*." *History: Review of New Books* 39, no. 4 (2011): 118.

#### Other published scholarly contributions

- Robins, Jonathan. "Crafting the Plasticene." *The Otter/La Loutre*, 2025, Network in Canadian History and Environment, <https://niche-canada.org/2025/08/07/crafting-the-plasticene/>.
- Robins, Jonathan. "Picking stories, selling chaga: how history helped make chaga a superfood." *The Otter/La Loutre*, 2023, Network in Canadian History and Environment, <https://niche-canada.org/2023/09/07/picking-stories-selling-chaga/>
- Gamel-Eldin, Mohamed (ed.), Erika Rappaport, Bronwen Everill, David Biggs, and

**Jonathan Robins.** Roundtable review of “Oil Palm: a Global History” H-Environment roundtable vol. 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://networks.h-net.org/robins-oil-palm-global-history-h-environment-roundtable-vol-14-no-4-2024>. (**author response to roundtable**).

Infante-Amate, Juan, Brandon Luedtke, Joshua MacFadyen, **Jonathan Robins** and Kate Stevens. “Fats of the Land: New Histories of Agricultural Oils.” *Agricultural History* 93, no. 3 (2019), 520-546. (**roundtable organizer and contributor**)

### **Grants and fellowships**

“Aluminum Critical Mineral Production via Landfill Mining: Environmental, community and technical feasibility for integrated multi-material resource recovery.”

Department of Energy/National Energy Technology Laboratory. PI Paul Sanders, Co-PIs Tim Eisele, Rob Handler, **Jonathan Robins**. April 2023-March 2026, \$749,980 (co-PI Robins: \$166,575).

UCHI Visiting Faculty Fellow, University of Connecticut Humanities Institute, Storrs, CT. August 2018 to May 2019, \$45,000.

American Philosophical Society and British Academy Joint Fellow, May-June 2018, \$6,500.

Michigan Tech Research Excellence Fund grant to support work on *Oil Palm: a Global History*, April 2018, \$3,188.

Cornell College of Human Ecology Dean’s Fellowship in the History of Home Economics. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, May-June 2016, \$6,500.

Pasold Research Fund publication grant to support image reproduction in *Cotton and Race across the Atlantic*. Pasold Research Fund, Edinburgh, April 2016, £400.

Michigan Tech Research Excellence Fund grant for image reproduction in *Cotton and Race across the Atlantic*.” Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI, April 2016, \$1,056.

William G. Jackson Grant, “Global Issues Blended Learning Initiative” (with Don LaFreniere). Jackson Center for Teaching and Learning, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI, February 2015, \$15,000.

Travel grant, “Chemical Reactions: chemical and global history conference.” Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia, April 2014, \$500.

Travel grant, “Cooperation under the premise of imperialism conference.” German Historical Institute (London), Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, and the University of Bern. Bern, June 2013, \$1,700.

Exploratory Research Grant, Center for the History of Business, Technology, and Society, Hagley Museum and Library, Delaware, June 2012, \$400.

Travel grant, “Commodities of Empire: Power and Resistance in Commodity Chains” conference. The Open University and London Metropolitan University, London, June 2009, £750.

College of Arts and Sciences Dean’s Fellowship. Department of History, University of Rochester. Rochester, NY, 2005-2009. Tuition & stipend.

### **Awards and honors**

Exceptional "average of 7 dimensions" teaching evaluation (top 10% in university) recognition, SS3553 Empires in World History, Fall 2024, Michigan Technological University.

Jerry H. Bentley Award for the best book on world history published in English, American Historical Association, 2022 (for *Oil Palm: a Global History*).

Henry A. Wallace Award for the best book on agricultural history outside the United States, Agricultural History Society, 2021. (For *Oil Palm: a Global History*)

Egon Berlin Prize for European History, Department of History, University of Rochester. Rochester, NY, 2008.

Elwitt Memorial Prize for British History, Department of History, University of Rochester, 2007.

Certificate of Distinction, Paul H. Nitze Scholars Program, St. Mary's College of Maryland, 2004.

Alison Quinn Award for Excellence in History, Department of History, St. Mary's College of Maryland, 2003.

### **Courses taught**

Michigan Technological University

**Undergraduate:** Global Issues, World History I and II, US History I, Slavery and Freedom in World History, Empires in World History, Food in World History, Global Economic History, Histories and Cultures of Africa, Historiography (and in redeveloped form as Making History), Advanced Research in the Social Sciences

**Graduate:** Global Industrial History, Global Environmental History, readings courses in food history, textile history, and commodity history

Morgan State University

World History I and II

SUNY Geneseo

Western Civilization I

University of Rochester

The West and World since 1492, Colonial and Contemporary Africa

### **Conference activities**

#### **Refereed and invited papers presented**

"Making kapok a commodity: scientific and commercial categorization and commodity development ca. 1850-1941." World Congress of Environmental History, Oulu, August 2024.

"Keeping power afloat: kapok across Dutch and American empires, 1900-1950." ASEH, Denver CO, April 2024.

"Tree Crop Plantations as Re/Afforestation." Agricultural History Society annual conference, Knoxville, June 2023.

"AI-generated Content in the Classroom: Challenges, Responses, and Opportunities."

- Poster presentation with Laura Brown (MTU Computer Science) and Jeff Toorongian (MTU Center for Teaching & Learning). Upper Peninsula Teaching and Learning Conference, Lake Superior State University, May 2023.
- “Palm Oil: Substitute, Substituted,” Resources and their substitutes: natural surrogates and synthetic competitors in world history, Harvard University, June 2022.  
**(invited)**
- “Colonialism and palm oil production in West Africa, ca. 1850-1960,” BrIAS W09 - The long term influence of Imperialism, Colonialism and Acculturation on Agricultural and Dietary change in Africa, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, April 2022.  
**(invited)**
- “Oil Palms at the End of Empire.” Robinson Business History Conference, Portland State University, April 2022.
- “Misreading Africa's oil palm landscapes: colonial legacies in agriculture, ecology, and agroforestry.” Plants in Africa and the Global South: Multi-species materialities, ecologies, and aesthetics, Consortium for the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine, October 2021. **(invited)**
- “Suited to Malaya? Origins of the Oil Palm Industry in Colonial Malaysia.” American Society for Environmental History conference, Riverside, CA, March 2018; paper also presented at “Southeast Asian Natures: Defining Environmentalism and the Anthropocene in Southeast Asia” workshop, UC Riverside Center for Ideas and Society & Southeast Asia Program, Palm Springs, CA, March 2018.
- “Nucleus Estates and Pioneer Mills: Models for Development in the Oil Palm Industry.” African Studies Association conference, Chicago, November 2017.
- “Capitalists, smallholders, and states on the oil palm frontier.” Global Commodity Frontiers in Comparative Historical Context workshop, Commodities of Empire British Academy Research Project (Institute of Latin American Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London and the Institute of the Americas, University College), and the international ‘Commodity Frontiers’ research initiative (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the University of Ghent, and Harvard University). London, December 2016.
- “‘Easy-made drink’ and the struggle over oil palm trees in colonial Ghana, 1900-1939.” African Studies Association conference, Washington DC, December 2016.
- “Food comes First: Creating a ‘Food Problem’ in Colonial Ghana.” Midwest Conference on British Studies, Ames, IA, September 2016.
- “Food and drink: palm oil and palm wine in colonial Ghana.” Environmental Histories of Commodities Workshop, Commodities of Empire project and the Institute of the Americas at University College of London, 2015.
- “From Hogless Lard to Smart Butter: Vegetable fats and the transformation of global food industries, 1850-1950.” American Society for Environmental History Conference, Washington DC, April 2015.
- “Discovering a ‘Food Problem’ in Colonial Ghana.” Britain and the World Conference, British Scholar Society, Austin TX, March 2015.
- “Oil boom: African farmers, western chemists, and the edible oils and fats revolution, 1880-1920.” Cain Conference: “Chemical Reactions: Chemistry and Global History,” Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia, April 2014.
- “Invested in Empire: Political Elites and Imperial Business in Nigeria and Uganda.”

- “Cooperation and Imperialism” conference, University of Bern, June 2013.
- “Lancashire and the New South: British fact-finding missions and the realignment of the global cotton industry,” Britain and the World Conference, British Scholar Society, University of Texas at Austin, March 2013.
- “Lancashire and the ‘Undeveloped Estates’: Financing Cotton Growing Campaigns in Britain, 1902-1918.” North American Conference on British Studies, Denver, November 2011.
- “Finding a Local in Global History.” Paper presented at the University of Rochester Global History symposium in honor of Anthony G. Hopkins, Rochester, NY, May 2008.
- “Confusion, Apathy, and Convenience: the British Cotton Growing Association, 1902-1914.” Graduate History Conference, University of Rochester, May 2007.

Panels organized

- “Commodity extraction across transimperial spaces.” American Society for Environmental History, April 2024 (co-organized with Jordan Howell, University of Manitoba).
- “Greasy matters: the political economy of fats and oils regulations in the first half of the twentieth century.” Agricultural History Society conference, August 2022. (co-organized with Ines Prodohl, University of Bergen; Robins was unable to attend).
- “Modeling Change, Changing Models: Demonstrations and Development in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa.” African Studies Association conference, November 2017.

Panel chair or discussant

- Chair: “New Histories of Environment, Ideas, and Disposessions.” American Society for Environmental History conference, March 2026.
- Moderator: “Cultures of Consumption” panel. Commodities of Empire Workshop: Threads of Empire.” University of Glasgow, September 2025.
- Chair: “Ecological Imaginaries and the Making of Trans-regional Landscapes.” American Society for Environmental History conference, April 2024.
- Chair: “Altering Climate, Altering Soil.” Agricultural History Society conference, June 2023.
- Discussant: “Oil Palms Across Time and Space: Local Landscapes, Multifarious Growers, Political Elites, Consumer Power, and the Shaping of the World’s Most Bountiful Vegetable Oil.” Agricultural History Society conference, June 2019.
- Discussant: “Ecological Imperialism in the Age of Industry.” American Society for Environmental History conference, March 2018.
- Chair: “Modeling Change, Changing Models: Demonstrations and Development in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa.” African Studies Association conference, November 2017
- Chair and discussant: “Information Networks in Britain and the British Empire,” Midwest Conference on British Studies, Ames, IA, September 2016.

Conference organization

Commodities of Empire project workshops (planning, participant selection, and discussant/moderator roles)

2026: Workshop: Locating Knowledge: Science and Technology in Commodity Frontiers  
 2025: Workshop: Threads of Empire – Modes, Materials and the Making of Textiles  
 2024: Workshop: Provisioning Conflicts: Food Commodities & War  
 2023: Workshop: Fur, Fin and Feather: Commodifying Wild Animals  
 2022: Workshop: Livestock as Global and Imperial Commodities: Economies, Ecologies and Knowledge Regimes, c.1500-present  
 2021: Online conference: Rethinking Tobacco History – Commodities, Empire and Agency in Global Perspective, 1780-1960  
 Workshop: The Raw and the Refined: Commodities, Processing and Power in Global Perspective

Other academic presentations

“A mine above the ground”: Aluminum firms and recycling in the U.S., 1950-1990.  
 Poster presentation with Lucy Gibbs at ASEH 2026 conference.  
 “Coffee Chat: AI Tools,” with Laura Brown (CS) and Jeff Toorongian (CTL), Michigan Technological University, February 2023. (Session organizer and presenter)

**Invited lectures and other selected talks**

“What Happens in a Landfill? Garbology and landfill mining research at Michigan Tech 2023-2026. Invited presentation for “Engineering value from waste: glass, tires, and landfill mining” public talk, Copper Country Recycling initiative, Hancock, MI, January 2026.  
 “Palm oil or palm wine? Commodities and anti-commodities in colonial West Africa.” **Invited presentation** at the Lausanne Advanced Seminar in Political Ecology, University of Lausanne Institute of Geography and Sustainability, November 2024.  
 “Palm Oil: the Making of a Global Commodity”; “Commodities and Global History,” two **invited lectures** for the Global Studies Seminar, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, May 2024.  
 “The Colonial Origins of the Palm Oil Industry.” **Invited keynote** for “Palm Oil Pitfalls” conference, Michigan State University and National Islamic University of Jambi, March 2024.  
**Invited seminar** on *Oil Palm: a Global History*, Cambridge History of Philosophy and Science Greenhouse, Cambridge University, 2022.  
 “The Problem with Palm Oil,” **invited talk** for Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition, May 2022.  
 “Oil Palm: a Global History,” **invited book talk**, Greenhouse New Book Series, University of Stavanger, February 2022.  
 “From Hogless Lard to Smart Balance: Fats, Technology, and Politics in the Global Food System.” **Invited talk**, Flora Rose House Scholar in Residence talk, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, March 2017.  
 “As Good as Butter? Home Economists and the New Fats.” Dean’s Fellowship Lecture, College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, March 2017.  
 “Circulation and the Global Cotton Industry.” **Invited keynote**, University of Rochester Graduate History Conference, February 2016.

### **Selected media and public history contributions**

- Interviewed for *Edible Empire: The Hidden Costs of Food* episode 2, “Deep Roots: a History of Palm Oil.” Producers: Neal Haddaway, Benjamin Eitelberg, and Emma Strutt (interview March 2026; podcast currently in production)
- Research adviser (Unilever’s DRC plantations), Cercle d’Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise and Center for Research on Multinational Companies, May 2025-present
- Interview on palm oil history for *Times of India* “Evoke” feature, April 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/palm-oil-prevails-from-soap-to-napalm-it-feeds-billions-but-pollutes-earth/articleshow/122792508.cms>
- “Landgrabbed.” Interview and guest appearance in documentary by Magdalena Krukowska. 2023. Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHLB2lprnCw>
- Long-form book interview about *Oil Palm: a Global History* for *American Prestige Podcast*, August 2023. [https://www.americanprestigepod.com/p/another-oil-w-jonathan-robins?src\\_iid=ca676e8b-0ad9-438f-b4b4-41605a53c361&utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=twitter-embed#details](https://www.americanprestigepod.com/p/another-oil-w-jonathan-robins?src_iid=ca676e8b-0ad9-438f-b4b4-41605a53c361&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=twitter-embed#details)
- Interviewed for Jennifer Barone, “Palm Oil Pushback,” *Scholastic ScienceWorld*, January 2023, <https://scienceworld.scholastic.com/issues/2022-23/011623/palm-oil-pushback.html?language=english#1120L>.
- “The Irreplaceable,” Bee Wilson, *London Review of Books* 44, no. 12 (June 2022). Front-cover featured review of Robins, *Oil Palm: a Global History* and Zuckerman, *Planet Palm*.
- Interview, “A Crude History of Palm Oil,” *Majority Report* podcast, April 2022. <https://majorityreportradio.com/2022/04/06/4-6-a-crude-history-of-palm-oil-w-jonathan-robins>
- Interviewed for *Gastropod* podcast, “The Most Interesting Oil in the World.” December 2021. <https://gastropod.com/the-most-interesting-oil-in-the-world/>
- Op-ed, “How Palm Oil Became the Most Used, Most Hated Fat in the World.” *The Conversation*, June 2021. <https://theconversation.com/how-palm-oil-became-the-worlds-most-hated-most-used-fat-source-161165>.
- Interviewed by Peter Guest for “Last Stand at Leuser,” *Raconteur Magazine*, November 2016 (<https://medium.com/@peterguest/last-stand-at-leuser-c150e13ceb86>)